



Lessons Learned and Recommendations from the Princeton Area Community Foundation All Kids Thrive Initiative

Over the five-year duration of the All Kids Thrive Initiative, grantee-partners have reflected on their implementation successes and challenges for the purposes of refining their interventions, increasing impact on students and families, and informing their broader organizational operations. The following policy and practice recommendations emerged from Metis' position as the All Kids Thrive evaluation partner and are drawn from a cumulative examination of the All Kids Thrive Initiative's successes and lessons learned. Together, the policy and practice recommendations provide a roadmap for a collaborative approach to addressing chronic absenteeism and student engagement that involves multiple stakeholders and leverages best practices identified through the All Kids Thrive Initiative.

Within this context, recommendations are provided in five sections. The first four sections are directed towards the constituencies best equipped to set the conditions for success, and the final section is designed to provide strategies and next steps the development of effective interventions carried out at the school and community-level.

- ✓ Recommendations for state stakeholders
- ✓ Recommendations for civic and municipal stakeholders
- ✓ Recommendations for district stakeholders
- ✓ Recommendations for grant-makers
- ✓ Recommendations for launching effective attendance interventions

The recommendations are preceded, as presented in the following section, by a brief overview of the four key pillars of the All Kids Thrive Initiative, as identified through this evaluation effort. Finally, Appendix A offers additional intervention-specific policy and practice solutions offered by All Kids Thrive grantee-partners upon reflection at the close of the Initiative.



Key Pillars of the All Kids Thrive Initiative Based on Lessons Learned

Overall, the lessons from the All Kids Thrive Initiative fall into the four key pillars depicted in Exhibit 1 below, which themselves center on the concepts of *access*, *support*, *learning*, and *collaborative partnership*. Each pillar, in turn, can be addressed by the actions of multiple constituencies. As a result, these themes resurface across multiple recommendations, as presented in the following sections.

Exhibit 1 - Pillars for success for the All Kids Thrive Initiative:

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| Equipping grantees for success through grant-maker support, effective school and district partnerships, and adequate access to data. | Effectively pursuing a learning agenda while retaining a focus on the delivery of services for the purposes of making an impact on students and families. | Recognizing and addressing the root causes of absenteeism both within and outside of schools and at the individual, family, and structural level. | Elevating school-community partnerships as the most effective model for addressing barriers to student engagement. |
| Relevant constituencies: | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Grant makers★ State stakeholders★ District stakeholders★ School stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Grant makers★ Grantee-partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Grant makers★ State stakeholders★ District stakeholders★ School stakeholders★ Grantee-partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none">★ Grant makers★ State stakeholders★ District stakeholders★ School stakeholders★ Grantee-partners |



Recommendations for State Stakeholders

The following recommendations are oriented towards state-level decision makers within Departments of Education and legislatures. They are written specifically for New Jersey—as they are based on the specific findings for the All Kids Thrive Initiative—but are likely applicable to state-level decision-makers more broadly. If followed, these recommendations provide local school districts, grant-makers, and community-based organizations (or school-community partnerships) with the conditions necessary for their own success. Within this context, the recommendations when taken together encourage state decision-makers to bring increased consistency, support, local-empowerment, and equity to the issue of chronic absenteeism.

The New Jersey legislature and State Department of Education should:

- 1. Explore strategies for empowering local school districts to better partner with community organizations.** First, state-level stakeholders and change-agents should provide school districts with guidance on how to navigate data privacy regulations to allow for greater student-level data sharing between schools and community organizations. A significant barrier facing schools and community organizations, which emerged through the All Kids Thrive Initiative, is the inability to readily access attendance data in a timely manner. Districts need legal consultation on how to offer partner organizations the data needed for timely interventions to take place before absenteeism reaches a chronic level.
- 2. Develop an updated and consistent attendance policy for all school districts within the state** that includes updated categories for excused and unexcused absences, provides regulations for applying absenteeism rules to hybrid and remote learning, and mandates district and school responsibilities around student and family engagement. This would ease cross-district collaborations and solutions, decrease inconsistencies between schools within any given district, and allow community organizations and change-makers to develop state-wide strategies for addressing chronic absenteeism. The four school districts that partnered with the All Kids Thrive Initiative each followed slightly different attendance policies, and superintendents acknowledged during interviews that the ambiguity at the state-level hampered their ability to develop local policies and practices.
- 3. Within attendance policies, recognize the challenges that local school districts face when supporting refugees, asylum seeking families, and other recently arrived families.** School districts and municipalities are reckoning, according to those interviewed through the All Kids Thrive Initiative, with rapidly shifting school communities that include greater numbers of students and families recently arrived from out of state and outside of the United States. School districts need the support of the state Department of Education in offering families greater flexibility to balance attendance against completing challenges, including immigration court and other legal proceedings,



legal ambiguity around school enrollment as non-citizens, greater rates of housing instability and unemployment, and language barriers.

- 4. Create a chronic absenteeism task force to research the complexity of the issues and convene a think tank to develop policy and legislative supports for districts and schools.** Superintendents and grantee-partners indicated that the State does not currently have the depth of resources needed to understand and address the complex and compounding issues related to the root causes of chronic absenteeism and especially how the pandemic has impacted those issues. It was suggested by All Kids Thrive stakeholders that the State convenes a task force to research chronic absenteeism and develop strategies to better support districts, schools, and families in ensuring that all students can access school regularly.
- 5. Consider incorporating results from the NJ Culture and Climate Survey as a metric in school performance measures.** Adding culture and climate metrics to the state accountability system would provide a more robust assessment of the impact that schools have on providing supportive environments to help students meet challenging academic benchmarks. According to All Kids Thrive Initiative stakeholders, this would allow for the more effective measurement of intermediate outcomes associated with enhancing school culture for the purposes of driving student engagement in learning.
- 6. Provide greater access to free transportation to school for low-income and urban students.** According to All Kids Thrive Initiative stakeholders, the current two-mile rule determined at the state-level for providing access to transportation to school is a barrier encountered by many low-income and urban students to attend school. These students may live un-walkable distances, such as for example, through high-traffic or unsafe areas and covering long areas (i.e. over a mile), especially on cold or stormy days. These students may not be able to get to school on a regular basis if their parents or guardians do not have access to a car.
- 7. Provide funding to expand attendance teams to all schools.** The Superintendents and grantee-partners highlighted the use of attendance teams in schools as an effective strategy for promoting regular attendance and targeting students in need of services to combat chronic absenteeism. As such, they recommended that the State expands resources for creating attendance teams to ensure that all schools have teams and adequate staffing to support attendance initiatives.



Recommendations for Civic and Municipal Stakeholders

The following recommendation is oriented towards civic and municipal stakeholders, although the involvement of this new constituency in collaborative efforts to address chronic absenteeism likely requires encouragement and deliberate outreach by grant-makers, local organizations, and school districts as well.

- 1. Civic and municipal agencies should be encouraged to actively engage in identifying and addressing causes of student absenteeism.** School and community partners have consistently identified sources of absenteeism that are rooted in community challenges external to the academic and school setting. Examples include, but are not limited to, housing and food insecurity, insufficient public transportation, lack of local and accessible medical care and mental health services, and barriers associated with public safety (e.g. unsafe conditions near schools or on transportation corridors). A unanimous belief among those interviewed for the All Kids Thrive Initiative was that solutions to these challenges should be co-created with municipal agencies, specifically through the convening of district and municipal stakeholders to develop solutions and share data on specific barriers to attendance. Involvement of community organizations can enhance collaborations by creating a bridge between districts and municipal agencies.



Recommendations for School District Stakeholders

The following recommendations are oriented towards school district stakeholders (e.g., district superintendents and other decision makers) that are motivated to address chronic absenteeism. These recommendations introduce immediate solutions and also set the conditions for effective interventions undertaken by community organizations and school-community partnerships.

School districts should:

- 1. Encourage school-community partnerships as a critical strategy for addressing student attendance and engagement.** While schools, school districts, and community organizations have demonstrated the ability to independently improve student attendance, there is a unanimous consensus that partnerships remain essential to efforts. In fact, both district superintendents and grantee-partners viewed partnerships as an enduring strategy and not a stop-gap measure in response to funding or other limitations within the school district. That is, neither school nor community stakeholders viewed partnerships as a temporary solution and instead recognized the added value of collaboration.
- 2. Embrace the Community School model of school-community partnership,** wherein one or more community organizations is brought into a school as a high-level partner for the purposes of co-creating interventions and supportive services for students and families. All Kids Thrive grantee-partners voiced exceedingly high levels of support for the Community School approach as a means of resolving barriers to attendance due to the partnership structure and the built-in recognition that absenteeism is the result of multiple interlaced factors best addressed through a comprehensive whole-family strategy. The Community School model also allows schools to better address the underlying causes of absenteeism. For example, the Community School model encourages the re-use of school and district infrastructure (e.g., school buildings) as locations for community service delivery (e.g., by opening schools to weekend and evening engagement activities for families). It also allows schools to be, as described by one grantee-partner, “utilized for broader community building and placemaking” which can benefit all families by addressing the underlying inequities that drive absenteeism among marginalized populations.
- 3. Work to identify and address patterns of inequity in student absenteeism.** While school-community partnerships add extraordinary value, inequity also needs to be addressed through the policies and practices of schools and school districts themselves. Within this context, the following specific recommendations emerged:
 - a. Ensure that students and families who are not proficient in English receive equal access to school staff, communications, services, and supports.** Schools and districts should be encouraged not to rely on community partners to engage with Spanish-



speaking and other communities. School materials should be readily accessible in multiple languages, and schools should ensure that onsite staff are equipped to engage families in the predominant languages spoken by their school communities. These actions, if taken, will ensure that student absenteeism is not driven by language barriers and/or the isolation and alienation perceived by families who are unable to connect with the schools their children attend.

- b. Assist school staff in understanding the causes of student disengagement from school that may be unrelated to school climate, classroom culture, or student and family interest or motivation in attendance through the delivery of information, professional development, and other resources.** Ensure that school staff recognize that families face multiple daily challenges which may interfere with their ability to have their children attend school. Encourage school staff to first consider and eliminate these causes of absenteeism before considering cultural or individual-level explanations (e.g., disinterest in school).
 - c. Proactively provide families with resources to navigate transportation needs that arise from district rezoning efforts to ameliorate negative impacts on school attendance and engagement.** All Kids Thrive grantee-partners consistently noted that rezoning efforts can substantially impact families. Rezoning disrupts school-community relationships and, for families reliant on public transportation, introduces unexpected barriers when the distance to school for their children changes. Therefore, districts undertaking this action should explore pre-emptive measures to support families during the process so that attendance is maintained.
 - d. Develop flexible and targeted approaches to attendance support to for student communities facing specific and increased hardship at any given time.** Over the duration of the All Kids Thrive Initiative, examples of increased hardships have included: legal and district ambiguities for non-citizen and refugee families regarding enrollment and the receipt of both school and municipal services, barriers to remote instruction among low-income families, and trauma associated with increased police violence and the community response in 2020 and 2021. Each of these hardships, in turn, were described through the All Kids Thrive Initiative as severely impacting students' ability to attend school and engage in learning.
- 4. Include Board of Education representatives in partnership efforts, where relevant.** All Kids Thrive grantee-partners noted that Board of Education representatives were often absent from collaborative discussions with district staff. Multiple stakeholders suggested that inviting elected stakeholders into the conversation could potentially increase the engagement of district leadership and departments by furthering the prioritization of partnership-development and/or



the particular focus of the strategic grantmaking initiative at hand (e.g., addressing chronic absenteeism).

5. Transition away from punitive responses to student absenteeism. Districts and schools should view chronic absenteeism as a means of identifying gaps in programs for students and families and focus on identifying and providing supportive services to address the gaps. Punitive responses to student absenteeism, such as the enforcement of truancy laws, can exacerbate already tenuous relationships that may exist between families and schools. Instead, districts should move away from deficit-based responses and instead focus on celebrating student attendance and engagement in school communities. An example within the All Kids Thrive Initiative, as shared by one interviewed stakeholder, is the use of congratulatory letters sent home to families whose children meet attendance benchmarks. These letters, for example, were described as having a meaningful impact on families who appreciated the recognition of their efforts.

6. Reframe academic expectations for students post-pandemic to decrease unrealistic pressures faced by students and families, which can negatively impact school attendance. Grantee-partners argued that students were at considerable risk of avoiding school due to the perception that they would “never be able to catch up” and that it was therefore “not worth attending.” Districts, in turn, are encouraged to communicate to families an awareness of these challenges and an acceptance of students, despite any interrupted learning incurred. This was described as likely to increase students’ willingness to attend school during the initial months, which in turn, provide students with further encouragement.



Recommendations for Strategic Grant-makers

The following recommendations are oriented towards philanthropic organizations seeking to support efforts to reduce absenteeism and increase student engagement. While the support of a strategic grant maker is not required—community organizations and school-community partnerships can flourish through other funding sources—findings from the All Kids Thrive Initiative suggest that strategic grant making can greatly accelerate the outcomes of efforts and drive organizational learning among involved organizations. Furthermore, the recommendations presented below are predicated on the assumption that a grant maker is interested in a blended initiative that prioritizes both learning and impact. Within this context, the All Kids Thrive Initiative was designed to strike an effective balance between delivering concrete results and fostering learning and organizational growth among grantee-partners, participating districts, and partnering schools. As such, recommendations are drawn from both the best practices which emerged through this Initiative, the feedback of interviewed stakeholders on the efforts of the Princeton Area Community Foundation, and the lessons learned across the duration of the grant.

Grant-makers should work to:

1. **Leverage pre-existing relationships to build connections with civic stakeholders.** Philanthropic partners, such as the Princeton Area Community Foundation, are well-positioned to use their own standing within each community to engage civic and municipal stakeholders and “translate” between the priorities of community organizations and the varied responsibilities of elected officials and agency representatives.
2. **Consider both the capacity of individual organizations and the characteristics of the cohort when selecting grantees.** This is especially important when a grantmaking effort holds the dual goals of making a direct impact and operating as a learning initiative. Based on the findings from the All Kids Thrive Initiative, the following practices should be followed:
 - a. **Focus on community organizations or community-school partnerships as potential grantees.** The All Kids Thrive Initiative was distinguished by the inclusion of both a school district and a school as two of the 10 lead grantee organizations. While both offered valuable perspectives, challenges also emerged from the decision not to focus only on community organizations as the lead partners. In particular, the inclusion of a district partner created a different dynamic which, while adding value, positioned this grantee differently. Instead, interviewed stakeholders suggested that schools and school districts could be engaged in such a venture through other mechanisms.
 - b. **Weigh the benefits and challenges of including organizations that are positioned within different educational or civic jurisdictions.** A defining characteristic of the All Kids Thrive Initiative was the effort to engage organizations across four school districts



within Mercer County, a decision which undoubtedly led to a broader impact. However, evaluation findings also indicate that this decision may have reduced the Initiative's ability to push for district-wide changes and created an additional layer of complexity, as grantees and the Community Foundation were required to address barriers around school and data access with four different jurisdictions. While this decision rests on multiple factors, including the mandate of a given philanthropic organization, the implications should be carefully considered.

- c. Include grantees that bring a variety of perspectives, focus areas, and prospective interventions.** The All Kids Thrive Initiative benefited greatly from the range of interventions—in scope, population, and area of focus—that were included through the selection of the initial 10 grantees. Within the All Kids Thrive Initiative, for example, grantee-partners operated at the district level (three grantee-partners), school-level (five grantee-partners), and student-level (two grantee-partners). Grantee-partners also varied in their institutional capacity, the extent to which absenteeism was a pre-existing focus, and the extent to which they were already partnering directly with schools and school districts. This diversity directly informed the Initiative's ability to elevate the root causes of absenteeism as well as the equity dimensions of this work. Furthermore, it was partly through this diversity of grantee-organizations that the Initiative was able to identify and uplift the Community School model as a potential solution for addressing the barriers students and families face when engaging in school.
- d. Assess the readiness of grantee-partners to contribute to the initiative.** For the All Kids Thrive Initiative, the successful impacts that accrued were perceived, in part, to be due to the readiness of the grantees. The Community Foundation sought grantee-partners that could demonstrate:
- ✓ flexibility,
 - ✓ an ability to leverage organizational strengths when designing an intervention,
 - ✓ an interest in sustaining the work of the initiative,
 - ✓ a commitment to the values of the philanthropic, and
 - ✓ an ability to hire and support effective staff.

In addition, for grantmaking efforts that hold learning outcomes as an equal objective, organizations should be able to demonstrate a pre-existing capacity for, and commitment to, self-reflection and continuous improvement that would allow greater contribution to the body of knowledge developed through the initiative. Organizations should be able to demonstrate internal mechanisms for collecting and using qualitative and quantitative data and an interest in making space for reflection among staff on an annual basis.



- 3. Assess the readiness of district partners, given the importance of district buy-in and collaboration.** The most difficult challenges that emerged through the All Kids Thrive Initiative were due to the complexities that grantee-partners faced when interfacing with schools and school districts. To this end, partnering school districts should be carefully vetted to ensure that their policies and practices allow for the necessary sharing of and access to critical student-level data, and that districts are able to help direct resources to schools in such a way that schools have the capacity to invest human resources in the funded partnerships. If, for example, administrators, teachers, and school staff have too many competing responsibilities to work with grantee-partners, the impact of such an initiative will be severely lessened. Grantee-partners from the All Kids Thrive Initiative also identified the importance of selecting districts that were pre-committed to treating absenteeism as an important issue and found that their own work was elevated by their districts' broader improvement efforts in this area.
- 4. Provide an extensive and robustly supported planning period prior to the launch of each grantee-partners' intervention.** The Princeton Area Community Foundation was lauded by grantee-partners for its investment in the planning portion of the All Kids Thrive Initiative. Similarly, interviewed stakeholders affirmed the importance of offering grantee-partners ample time to develop their proposed interventions. In this area, the Community Foundation also demonstrated necessary flexibility, extending the planning phase for grantees further into the duration of the Initiative. To this end, the Community Foundation adjusted their expected timeline and offered support to help grantees focus on revising their designs to address the real-world challenges and contexts that they faced within their communities. This extended planning phase also allowed grantee-partners to effectively incorporate initial learnings—specifically around the structural challenges that students and families face—into their designs, which led multiple grantees to shift away from individual interventions (e.g., student motivation and incentives) to addressing deeper barriers (e.g., transportation safety and housing stability).
- 5. Invest deeply in technical assistance and capacity building efforts for grantees at multiple phases of the initiative to maximize impact and learning.** All Kids Thrive grantee-partners consistently reported that the technical assistance provided to them by the Community Foundation was beneficial and enhanced their ability to serve their program participants and develop learning outcomes. At the same time, new technical assistance and capacity building needs emerged throughout the duration of the grant, meriting further support. Most important and requested topics included capacity building around accessing and leveraging student-level data, strategies for documenting and communicating grantees' impact, incorporating mental health into intervention models, and planning for close-out and transition from the All Kids Thrive Initiative. In addition, grantee-partners benefited from initial trainings on the collection and analysis of qualitative data (specifically for the purposes of enriching interventions and distilling best practices based on the feedback of staff and stakeholders).



6. **Demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness to grantees.** The Community Foundation was recognized for its willingness to allow grantee-partners to adjust their models over the duration of the Initiative, in some instances making substantive modifications to their designs, including the introduction of new partners and new focus areas. This approach demonstrated a commitment to immediately applying lessons learned instead of viewing the initiative as immutable over the five-year duration. In fact, as early as the first year of the Initiative, grantee-partners began to refocus on the broader systemic and community-level challenges facing students and families and recognized that many students with chronic absenteeism wanted to attend school but were often unable to do so for a variety of reasons.

The flexibility of the Princeton Area Community Foundation during the Covid-19 pandemic was also considered an essential factor underlying the overall success of the All Kids Thrive Initiative. The Community Foundation was described as immediately supporting the needs of the communities that it served by leaning into its capacity as a responsive grant maker to allow grantees to expand their use of grant funding to serve real time needs during this time of crisis. In addition, grantee-partners greatly appreciated the Community Foundation's proactive interest in reducing the reporting burden associated with the All Kids Thrive Initiative during this time to allow grantee-partners to meet the immediate needs of students and families.

7. **Develop cross-grantee branding and public awareness campaigns.** Initiative stakeholders valued their involvement in the Initiative but suggested that it was missing a robust branding and public awareness campaign that reached school, civic, district, and community decision-makers. As such, strategic grant-makers should consider how to supplement the efforts of individual grantees with coordinated outreach efforts designed to create a foundation of interest among relevant communities.
8. **Maintain high-touch relationships with grantee-partners and associated stakeholders to engender collaboration and a commitment to collaborative partnership.** As demonstrated by the decision of the Princeton Area Community Foundation to describe and approach All Kids Thrive grantees as grantee-partners, strategic grant-makers should commit to reflecting on and upending the traditional dynamics of the funder relationship. Grantee-partners consistently described the relationship with the Community Foundation as trusting, sanction-free, and collaborative, which allowed them to request assistance, discuss challenges, and discuss potential opportunities without repercussion.

Additional best practices which emerged in this area included the involvement of the Community Foundation's senior leadership in conversations and frequent check-ins with grantees and district partners, and the respect that was given by Community Foundation staff to grantee-partners, their communities, and staff during conversations, meetings, and convenings. Grantee-partners felt respected, listened to, and well-cared for by the Community Foundation over the duration of the



grant. Similarly, district partners (e.g., district superintendents) greatly appreciated their access to the Community Foundation and reported that the Community Foundation made efforts to understand their specific responsibilities as district leaders as well as the various challenges that their districts faced. This allowed for realistic conversations to take place and empowered district staff to make requests and suggestions of the Community Foundation as well.

9. Intentionally support a culture of reflection and peer engagement from inception. Through the All Kids Thrive Initiative, the Princeton Area Community Foundation demonstrated practices that facilitated effective and productive peer learning among grantees but also confirmed that challenges can also arise when carrying out this type of grantmaking efforts. Within this context, the following best practices for a learning-focused initiative emerged through this work.

- a. Begin the development of a peer learning community early in the Initiative, providing grantee-partners with immediate opportunities to share practices and benefit from the cumulative expertise of the grantmaking cohort.** Almost immediately, in the first year of the All Kids Thrive Initiative, grantee-partners indicated the value of having access to peer organizations conducting the same type of work and expressed a resounding interest in increased opportunities for peer learning. Grantee-partners asked not only for periodic convenings but also for additional platforms for building peer-to-peer relationships, such as online platforms for sharing resources and launching discussions, ad-hoc events centered on specific challenges or opportunities faced by grantees, and further peer learning communities organized around shared characteristics such as the intervention, target populations, or district partner.
- b. Support peer learning efforts with a dedicated staff team.** Findings from the All Kids Thrive Initiative suggest that the Community Foundation would have benefited from a dedicated Initiative leadership, as well as a broader support team to ensure that the learning activities were able to be implemented throughout the Initiative's five-year duration. Grantee-partners and interviewed stakeholders greatly appreciated a later decision to hire a dedicated staff member supporting this work and saw a marked improvement in the value of the peer learning opportunities once that step was taken.
- c. Assess the capacity of grantee-partners for internal reflection and provide targeted technical assistance that is responsive to the identified gaps.** Learning outcomes are best supported if grantee-partners have the capacity and expertise to maintain their own continuous improvement efforts, collect analyze and report qualitative data, and develop internal mechanisms for the detailed tracking of process data.
- d. Require grantee-partners to conduct and submit local evaluation reports prepared by a cross-initiative evaluation partner or in-house evaluation staff.** While local



evaluations were specified in the first year of the All Kids Thrive Initiative (with five grantee-partners indicating that they would conduct an internal evaluation and five grantee-partners indicating that they would turn to an external evaluation partner), the delivery of local reports did not materialize. This represented a lost opportunity for the accumulation of local knowledge.

- e. **Provide clear expectations around data and reporting and maintain consistent requirements across the initiative.** Grantee-partners appreciated consistency and clarity around grant reporting and accountability, but findings from the All Kids Thrive Initiative indicated a level of frustration with the shifting expectations, as well as unclear understanding of how the Community Foundation was using outcome data to account for funding decisions.
- f. **Prioritize access to data for grantee-partners.** A consistent lack of access to attendance and student-level data across the Initiative's grantee-partners was a pervasive challenge that directly hampered the ability for the All Kids Thrive Initiative to develop its intended knowledge base and assessment of each intervention's impact on student attendance and engagement. Ensuring access to data should be prioritized by the strategic grant-maker and all possible avenues for gaining access should be explored. Data should also be viewed to include not only attendance data but all information that assists grantee-partners in the assessment of expected outcomes. In addition, a realistic accounting of data access should be undertaken during the Initiative's planning phase to ensure that interventions that rely on data access are able to move forward. For example, multiple grantee-partners indicated in Year 1 of the Initiative an ability to access not only student-level attendance data but also academic performance and disciplinary and behavioral information for students served by their programs.



Recommendations for Launching Effective Attendance Interventions

The following recommendations are provided for community organizations and school-community partnerships seeking to resolve barriers to student attendance faced by students and families. While rates of chronic absenteeism will be likely reduced through these efforts, the recommendations presented are focused on addressing student attendance and school engagement more broadly. These recommendations are drawn from the comprehensive evaluation of the All Kids Thrive Initiative yet are focused on strategies which will support a wide array of specific interventions. That is, if these recommendations are followed, organizations will still be able to deliver specific services that are relevant to their own missions and core competencies.

Interventions should:

1. **Follow effective practices for school-community partnerships, as identified through the All Kids Thrive Initiative.** Specifically, grantee-partners across the All Kids Thrive Initiative emphasized the importance of building partnerships on a foundation of open and frequent communication predicated by shared organizational values, buy-in at multiple staff levels at both organizations, and mutual demonstrations of added value. In addition, grantee-partners also indicated that successful partnerships need to have effective functionality in the key areas of participant referrals and outreach, data sharing, and fiscal relationships.
 - a. **School-community partnerships should utilize and enhance attendance teams for the purpose of identifying students at risk of chronic absenteeism and collaborating on targeted solutions.** The creation and support of school-based attendance teams was found to be a critical strategy across districts and All Kids Thrive projects, both directly (as a mechanism funded by the Initiative) and indirectly (as a means of coordinating with community partners). These efforts were further enhanced through the incorporation of feedback from teachers, social workers, parent coordinators, and other school staff to identify those in need of intervention. Grantee-partners across the All Kids Thrive Initiative recognized the importance of engaging with school staff other than teachers as a critical strategy for building a whole-child approach to addressing student absences. Selected examples of how school-community partnerships were used to anchor the use of data in this way, as reported by grantee-partners, are presented in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3 –Examples of how partnerships used data to inform interventions, as described by grantee-partners

"An almost-weekly in-house attendance team meeting is held to discuss not only numbers, but the names and faces behind the numbers. Chronically absent students receive the most attention during these meetings which are meant to identify potential



and existing attendance challenges. Mediation sessions and improvement or incentive plans are born out of the data review and analysis. Changes to plans and strategies are made as dictated by the data.”

“Typically, the school's Attendance Team meets either Monthly or biweekly. They analyze data, determine students who need support and share this info with us at [grantee organization]. We either engage them in an Attendance Group, work with parents or both. The Director of Community Schools pulls data monthly, develops reports and shares with schools for actions.”

“The school district sends us monthly attendance data that is disaggregated by school and demographic groups. That data is shared with the [grantee organization] coaches who use that as the focus of coaching conversations with the school teams. The coaches guide the coaching discussions toward the sub-groups that appeared to experience the greatest struggles with attendance. The struggling sub-groups in [the school district] are consistent with the sub-groups that have been identified in the larger body of national research. The coaching conversations have led the school teams to identify and target the subgroups and then specific students for more intense interventions - Tier 2 and 3.”

- b. Develop partnership models that respect the limited capacity of school administrators and teachers** within the current funding and policy climate to provide or participate in non-academic activities. Partnerships can be most successful when the given intervention does not require the active participation of specific school staff and, thus, are not hampered by shifts in school resources or staff availability. Partnerships, therefore, should be strategic but not necessarily based on a blending of school and community staff within the same program.
- c. Anchor partnerships in open communication, shared values, and the cultivation of initial buy-in among school staff and administrators.** Efforts should be made to ensure that each of these factors are present in a school-community partnership and that investments are made towards developing these features. In particular, the initial identification of potential school partners should include an honest assessment of leadership's interest in the partnership and willingness to encourage buy-in among school staff. Similarly, efforts need to be made to develop concrete mechanisms for communication and a predictable cadence for school-community meetings. Multiple layers of communication should exist between school and community organization leaders and school staff and community organization staff. In addition, communication options should exist for ad-hoc exchanges in response to urgent and critical family and student needs and crises.



- d. **Create data sharing workflows that provide community organizations with actionable data that can inform service delivery in a timely manner.** A major barrier to effective partnerships throughout the duration of the All Kids Thrive Initiative was the difficulty for community partners to access school attendance data. Data sharing was limited by perceived and actual privacy concerns, which subsequently led to the restriction of direct access by community partners to district's data systems. This, in turn, transferred the burden of collecting and transmitting data from community partners to school staff, an unsustainable option within the context of the partnerships created. For attendance interventions to be data-informed, information needs to be shared frequently and with enough detail to guide individual- or cohort-level services (e.g., services provided to specific families or groups of students). While data sharing is also helpful for accountability purposes (e.g., quarterly assessments of impact), addressing chronic absenteeism requires active monitoring of attendance patterns and rapid response.

2. Focus on attendance and student engagement as a means of addressing chronic absenteeism.

By focusing on the broader categories of attendance and student engagement (e.g., ability to learn, without distraction, within and outside of school), programs will be able to serve a wider range of families including those who would benefit from greater engagement in school but are not at the threshold between (regular) absenteeism and chronic absenteeism. In addition, this switch would also allow for greater focus on students who are already chronically absent and would benefit from a reduction in further absences. Furthermore, by focusing on general attendance, program impact will be captured at a finer scale, allowing for more effective organizational learning. For example, instead of measuring a binary outcome of "chronically absent or not chronically absent," programs can measure slight changes in average attendance rates. Finally, interventions focused on student engagement will be better able to pivot during future periods of hybrid or remote instruction and the subsequent shifts in how virtual "attendance" is defined.

3. **Be data-driven.** Effective interventions were described by All Kids Thrive Initiative grantee-partners as those that are deeply informed by the ongoing collection of data to set initial priorities, identify target populations to receive grant-funded interventions, and inform continuous improvement efforts. Grantee-partners encouraged interventions to be informed, at least partially, by district-wide data collection efforts and sources, such as school climate surveys and student belongingness assessments. Furthermore, grantee-partners and Initiative stakeholders recommended that data be continuously disaggregated to uplift equity goals. For example, the impact of chronic absenteeism interventions should be explored through the disaggregation of attendance data by multiple characteristics, including but not limited to household income, student race/ethnicity, and English Language Learner status. Although the use of data shifted across the duration of the Initiative, grantee-partners shared robust examples of how data was used to inform their interventions during the final year of their grant.



- 4. Address external and school-centered barriers to attendance within schools, school districts, and communities.** Through the 10 projects funded by the All Kids Thrive Initiative, the benefits of both categories of projects were effectively demonstrated—in particular those that offered solutions supplementing the school experience (e.g., add-on mentoring, mental health services) and those seeking to transform traditional school experiences (e.g., provision of incentive programs). In addition, as the Initiative matured, grantee-partners began partnering more closely with each other to further pair interventions in a complementary manner.
- 5. Pair student-level attendance strategies with intensive efforts to enhance school culture and climate.** Grantee-partners and Initiative stakeholders were adamant about the importance of pairing student- and family-level interventions with a focus on building school culture and climate that is inviting, celebratory, empowering, and supportive to students and families. Strategies for enriching school culture included investing in arts education as a school-wide approach to transform educational practice, introducing trauma-informed practices, incorporating restorative justice and other alternatives to traditional disciplinary measures, and holding trainings on cultural responsiveness and equity.
- 6. Support teachers and instructional staff as a means of increasing student engagement.** All Kids Thrive grantee-partners maintained an awareness of the challenges faced by school staff, especially but not only during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers were understood to be both facing their own challenges as well as grappling with the secondary trauma incurred through the exposure to students' struggles. Examples used by the All Kids Thrive grantee-partners included:
 - ✓ *The provision of instructional strategies and whole-school approaches to uplifting school climate and culture (e.g., through the introduction of arts education),*
 - ✓ *The supporting of teachers with additional resources, and*
 - ✓ *Dedicated teacher coaching.*
- 7. Address parent/family member needs to help mitigate challenges to children's regular school attendance.** This may include one or more of the strategies that were used by All Kids Thrive grantee-partners, such as:
 - ✓ *Providing families with comprehensive support by connecting attendance interventions to broader programs offered by the same organization, such as access to healthy and ample food, connections to mental and physical health services, clothing, legal services, transportation, and domestic violence referrals.*



- ✓ *Providing before and after-care programs for families, thereby extending the day for students and allowing families to maintain work and other responsibilities.*
- ✓ *Offering management and service navigation for the families of students participating in the attendance intervention.*
- ✓ *Liaising between families and schools and providing translation services for families.*
- ✓ *Developing parent and family communities to celebrate student achievements and building informal support networks, such as monthly meetings for families.*

8. Address predominant root causes of absenteeism. While grantee-partners argued strongly that each intervention should be informed by the specific needs of the community being served, they also agreed that program model should consider common root causes of those needs. Exhibit 4, for example, showcases causes of chronic absenteeism identified during Years 2, 3, and 4 of the Initiative.

Exhibit 4 - Predominant root causes of absenteeism identified by grantee-partners

- ✓ Housing and food insecurity
- ✓ Family responsibilities interfering with school engagement, such as caring for family members and younger siblings
- ✓ Transportation challenges
- ✓ Language barriers
- ✓ Challenges due to citizenship status
- ✓ Students' mental health and medical needs
- ✓ Inconsistent school, district, and cultural messaging around importance of attendance
- ✓ Lack of mechanisms for building relationships with those who speak a home language other than English
- ✓ Insufficient support for families new to the school, school district, and community
- ✓ Secondary trauma among instructors and staff leading to negative teacher-student interactions
- ✓ Unintended consequences of school policies (e.g., lack of clean student uniforms leading to absences)
- ✓ Family and student perceptions of violence and threats to safety on school premises and/or during the commute to school
- ✓ Bullying and harassment leading to avoidance of school by students



- ✓ Conflicts in parents' work schedules (either preventing them from transporting the child to school or supervising and assisting with remote learning attendance)
- ✓ Food insecurity and hunger
- ✓ Literacy issues
- ✓ Students' sense that they are too far behind to catch up
- ✓ Student disengagement due to the belief that they are not receiving a quality education

9. Be flexible enough to address the causes of students' non-attendance that are often exacerbated in times of social and community crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Organizations choosing to address student absenteeism should develop interventions that allow for flexibility when crises emerge. This responsiveness was modeled by the grantee-partners of the All Kids Thrive Initiative, all of whom pivoted during the third year of the Initiative to remain responsive to the shifting needs of students and families and to cross-district shifts towards remote and hybrid instruction. Examples from the Initiative of how organizations can modify attendance interventions in times of crisis include:

- ✓ *Shifting the modality of service delivery to meet the constraints of a given crisis.* For example, multiple grantee-partners moved towards online service delivery, offering to the extent possible a similar level of care through remote means. In certain situations, dedicated grantee-partner staff also continued to interact with students and families using safe procedures (e.g., social distancing).
- ✓ *Expanding care facilitation and case management practices as the number of services accessed by families increase.* Staff at several grantee-partner organizations sought to expand referrals based on the growing needs of families.
- ✓ *Adding supplemental services that are less directly related to attendance but address the immediate and long-term needs of students and families.* Grantee-partners recognized that the priorities facing families shift during crises.
- ✓ *Prioritizing the maintenance of program-participant relationships with the expectation of restarting program interventions post-crises.* Multiple grantee-partners shared the importance of remaining connected to students and families even when services themselves were lessened.



Appendix A: Intervention-Specific Policy and Practice Solutions Offered by All Kids Thrive Grantee-Partners

Grantee-partners were asked at the close of the Initiative to reflect on their experience within the All Kids Thrive Initiative and propose solutions for addressing chronic absenteeism that could be carried out moving forward. The solutions offered by grantee-partners across the Initiative demonstrate a deep understanding of root causes of absenteeism and the need for complex solutions which prioritize comprehensive supports for students, families, and school stakeholders as well as the continuation of strong school-community partnerships. The following snapshots present the suggestions of each grantee-partner, in their own words. Each snapshot also includes their self-reported outcomes in Year 5 and their populations served, for additional context.

Mercer Street Friends

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

- ✓ Increased attendance
- ✓ Other

Populations served in Year 5:

- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ School Administrators
- ✓ Other school staff
- ✓ Parents and family members
- ✓ Community members
- ✓ Students

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

Based upon our experience with the AKT initiative and our work done with schools we see that Chronic Absenteeism is just a symptom of greater problems such as; Socio Economics Needs, Mental/Physical Health, Family Issues. Families economic needs (housing, job readiness, lack of income) are just a few things that take a toll on a family and create a home environment in distress. Mental and Physical Health Needs are many and growing, access to quality health care, insurance issues, Social Emotional needs, accessibility of Mental Health Services, Food Inequity are abundant throughout the city and resources are limited in areas, school attendance becomes secondary to survival. Finally, family needs such as displaced members, family strife, domestic violence, abuse impact mental health. We, at Mercer Street Friends see the school as a connector between the families/children and the services. This can begin to be addressed through the development of Community Schools, designed to connect families to the services.



Mercer Street Friends

As a Community School partner with 3 schools in the Trenton Public Schools District, we at Mercer Street Friends realize that there needs to be better alignment between the schools, city and non-profit. The school district and city need to make a real commitment to this initiative if it is to yield desired results; connecting families to resources and helping families become advocates for themselves. Once all three entities work closer together, then the schools, city will be able to see improvements in academics, socio economic needs and juvenile crime. A purposefully planned and developed steering Committee of committed organizations, including public entities needs to be formed and strategically plan for the implementation of the Community School Initiative across the city.

Foundation for Educational Administration – Hedgepeth/Williams IS

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

- ✓ **Increased attendance**
- ✓ **Reductions in student tardiness**
- ✓ **Improvements in academic performance**
- ✓ **Improvements in school climate**
- ✓ **Improvements in student or family wellbeing**
- ✓ **Improvements in students' ability to engage in learning**
- ✓ Other

Populations served in Year 5:

- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ School Administrators
- ✓ Other school staff
- ✓ Parents and family members
- ✓ Community members
- ✓ Students
- ✓ Other

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

In so many arenas, we know that "It Takes a Village" to solve our students' complex and intertwined issues related to chronic absenteeism, poverty, housing and food insecurity, and mental health. The concept of a community school is one that we embrace. Without designated funding for an official status, we work diligently to include families, community organizations, faith-based groups, and arts organizations to assist our faculty and staff in combating these societal maladies.

In a perfect world, Hedgepeth/Williams Intermediate School would become a community school where our integrated approach would be sustained. Our school would have the resources to sustain these features that we currently offer periodically:

- before and after school programs beyond the traditional extracurricular and athletic programs, with an emphasis on arts and arts integration.
- learning opportunities for family and community members; and
- physical and mental health and wellness support.
- Formal partnerships with community organizations and businesses would broaden the educational and



Foundation for Educational Administration – Hedgepeth/Williams IS

- experiential scope of learning making the school a hub of community activity.
- This is our vision which we hope will be realized in the future.

Trenton Public Schools

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

- ✓ **Improvements in school climate**
- ✓ Improvements in student or family wellbeing

Populations served in Year 5:

- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ School Administrators
- ✓ Other school staff
- ✓ Parents and family members
- ✓ Community members
- ✓ Students

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

1. I believe the solution would be to allow students to virtually complete assignments and be provided with the option for some version of online learning. 2. There would have to be a high-level conversation with the school leadership team to review CA data and compare it to student achievement and how we can work creatively to close those gaps. 3. School/Community focus groups & meeting with policy committee members to pitch allowing students that miss school to be able to receive credit for completing assignments virtually.

Arm in Arm

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

- ✓ **Increased attendance**
- ✓ **Improvements in academic performance**
- ✓ **Improvements in student or family wellbeing**
- ✓ **Improvements in students' ability to engage in learning**
- ✓ Other

Populations served in Year 5:

- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ School Administrators
- ✓ Other school staff
- ✓ Parents and family members
- ✓ Community members
- ✓ Students

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

Throughout 5 years of implementing our AKT program, our work has shown that improved household stability results in improved school attendance. With better access to basic needs and additional resources and services that create stability, children are more likely to attend school regularly as barriers to security are removed. This solution would require having Navigators or Case Managers to help families access resources, and work with them long-term to make them sustainable. We also



Arm in Arm

suggest the creation of a Resource Guide made available to families in addition to the Navigator/Case Manager who advocates for them on their journeys to stability. If this solution is to take shape in our community, there needs to be a broader recognition that these families, particularly those new to the US, want and need to feel connected to their community. These families need representation and a voice. For example, the process of redistricting proceeded without the input or representation of these parents, many of whom found themselves without transportation to newly assigned schools and without adequate communication around the changes. These families needed advocacy and guidance. They needed robust communication, in both English and Spanish, and access to transportation and other resources necessary to ensure their children could get to school. When Spanish-speaking families do not receive communications from the school and the District which they can read and understand, they are further isolated and fearful, and more hesitant to ask for help.

The following policy initiatives would also encourage better student attendance and improve parent engagement:

- More Navigators/Advocates in the community or at each school
- Healing Centered Engagement at all schools
- Cultural sensitivity training for all school personnel
- Multi-lingual school registration helpdesk and connectivity help-desk at the BOE

Princeton YMCA

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

- ✓ Increased attendance
- ✓ Reductions in student tardiness
- ✓ Improvements in academic performance
- ✓ Improvements in school climate
- ✓

Populations served in Year 5:

- ✓ Parents and family members
- ✓ Community members
- ✓ **Students**

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

It begins with accurate attendance tracking. The high school allows students to enter and leave the building throughout the day, which creates opportunities for truancy. Many of our students in the program are recent immigrants and struggle in the classroom but also must work to help support their families. Vocational training and supplemental language classes (conversational) may be helpful. We can accomplish this by working with our community partners.



Every Child Valued

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

- ✓ **Increased attendance**
- ✓ Improvements in academic performance

Populations served in Year 5:

- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ School Administrators
- ✓ Other school staff
- ✓ Parents and family members
- ✓ Community members
- ✓ Students

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

Regarding the solutions to chronic absenteeism:

- All schools should provide before care options that open early enough to accommodate working parents
- schedules so children are not left unsupervised and are affordable and/or free
- All schools should be providing breakfast, so no child starts school hungry
- We need to recognize that although life seems to have returned to normal, it might not feel normal for our students. Some lost family from COVID-19 and all had their lives turned upside down in what seems like a moment's notice. School is a refuge for many of our students and they lost that during the pandemic. We need to recognize and address the trauma our children faced during the pandemic, particularly during school closures and
- increase mental health efforts in our schools. I think in our district, it is taking steps in the right direction by taking an active role in the Healing Centered Engagement Initiative.
- We need to acknowledge that most students experienced learning loss, particularly ones living in poverty, during the pandemic and schools need to stop trying to play 'catch up' and meet them where they are now, not where they should be at this point. Otherwise, they will be more likely to not want to attend school.
- We need to have less focus on standardized test scores and worry more about having high standard programs for children (i.e. mental health).
- Schools must recognize that chronic absenteeism is an equity issue. During our district's strategic planning process, students were surveyed about their feelings about sense of belonging and the survey showed that many African American students do not feel a sense of belonging at the high school. A correlation needs to be made if students do not feel like they belong, they will not want to go to school (which is reflected in our data with the high school having one of the highest chronic absenteeism rates among students at Eggerts Crossing Village that are also mostly also African American).



Trenton Health Team

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

✓ Other

Populations served in Year 5:

✓ Other

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

The community schools' model is one that can be successfully implemented to address chronic absenteeism. One thing we learned over the past five years is that there is no one size that fits all solution to prevent absenteeism. Students miss school for several different reasons; these reasons include things such as health issues, bullying, and food insecurity. The community schools model works by embedding resources in the school that meet the specific needs of the student population.

Community schools look different depending on the needs of the school community. For example, a middle school that has a large population of students with mental health issues would benefit from having mental health providers on site to provide counseling services. An elementary school might be better situated to offer primary care services, so children could receive mandated physicals and vaccines. Schools

located in areas with higher food insecurity would benefit from having a food pantry on site and offering SNAP enrollment assistance to parents. Overall, the responses to chronic absenteeism will need to be as varied as the causes.

Another important learning from this project is that the time of existing school staff is already fully accounted for. While we understand how resource constrained the district is, in order for TPS to address chronic absenteeism, they need to have staff assigned to receiving, understanding, and acting upon data about students and their unique circumstances. This may mean partnering with external organizations who could provide consulting services to the district or otherwise embed with district staff.

Lastly, good data can help the district develop responses targeted to individual students, individual schools, grade levels, and the district as a whole. If decision making is done using data, this is an equitable way to deploy resources to each school.

Connect Trenton

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

✓ **Improvements in academic performance**
✓ Increased attendance

Populations served in Year 5:

✓ Teachers
✓ Students

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:



Connect Trenton

- Early identification and intervention: Implementing proactive strategies to identify students at risk of chronic absenteeism and providing appropriate support early on can make a significant difference. This can involve regular monitoring of attendance records, identifying patterns, and intervening promptly to address underlying issues.
- Engaging and relevant curriculum: Creating a curriculum that is engaging, relevant, and tailored to students' needs can foster a sense of belonging and motivation. When students feel connected to their learning and see its value, they are more likely to attend school regularly.
- Supportive school climate: Building a positive and inclusive school environment where students feel safe, supported, and valued is crucial. Promoting positive relationships among students, teachers, and staff can contribute to higher attendance rates. Encouraging parent and community involvement can also enhance a sense of belonging and accountability.
- Wraparound services: Providing comprehensive support services to address the various barriers that contribute to chronic absenteeism is essential. This can include mental health services, counseling, mentoring programs, transportation assistance, and access to basic needs like food and healthcare.

Foundation for Educational Administration - NJPSA

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

- ✓ **Increased attendance**
- ✓ **Improvements in school climate**
- ✓ **Improvements in students' ability to engage in learning**
- ✓ Other

Populations served in Year 5:

- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ School Administrators
- ✓ Other school staff
- ✓ Students

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

There are several factors that contribute to Chronic Absenteeism in Hamilton schools. The historic practice of designating "overflow" schools solves the problem of overcrowding but creates further isolation for children who are new to the school district. Further the practice of having only one bus to transport the students across the district creates a problem for the youngster who misses the bus. For many youngsters, if they miss the bus they miss the day at school. Both issues could be resolved by redrawing the boundary lines for the schools closest to Trenton. That would require action by the school board and there does not appear to be an appetite for that.

In addition to the imbalance in school age populations, the Climate and Culture in the schools has a direct impact on whether or not students feel welcomed and included in the school. Ensuring that Climate Teams are functional and supportive is essential.



Foundation for Educational Administration - NJPSA

In the past, many schools took a legalistic approach to absenteeism. Over the course of this grant, we have observed procedure changes in the ways that absenteeism is addressed, and faculty members have commented on a more positive impact.

Unfortunately, the pandemic created greater isolation among the neediest students. Going forward the schools need to continue their focus on the school climate and culture and take a humanistic approach, based on "Street Data" (Safir and Dugan) to support the chronically absent students.

Young Audiences

Perceived outcomes in Year 5:

- ✓ **Increased attendance**
- ✓ **Improvements in school climate**
- ✓ **Improvements in student or family wellbeing**
- ✓ **Improvements in students' ability to engage in learning**
- ✓ Other

Populations served in Year 5:

Teachers
School Administrators
Other school staff
Parents and family members
Students

✓

Intervention-specific recommendations for continuing to improve students' academic engagement:

Wilson staff report that the Arts Lab model has been and continues to be effective. They shared that offering the following components results in a holistic approach:

- Providing students with engaging content and exciting experiences so they have positive educational experiences and want to come to school
- Meeting SEL needs within classrooms so that students know they will get what they need
- Cultivating a positive school culture in which students feel like part of the community
- Educating parents on the importance of attendance
- Encouraging family participation in school events to foster a strong, connected community
- Utilizing the Student Success Team to address absenteeism before it becomes chronic
- The Wilson team plans to continue implementing as many of these practices as possible, but shared that funding is the most significant barrier. Jenn Barker, the Wilson Climate and Culture Specialist, shared, "It always connects back to money. We can implement all the policies and programs we can create, but the implementation depends on fully funded schools and districts."